

A comment on public housing

IN addition to the presentation on "The effects of redevelopment policy on residents" in the symposium held by the HK Council of Social Service, I want to comment on the arrangement of public housing for low income tenants. At present, the policy of the Housing Authority is to offer cheaper flats in older estates to tenants who cannot afford the high rent in new estates and to assist the very poor by rent allowance through Public Assistance. The Authority also seems to

have felt the need to encourage Social Welfare Department to relax the Public Assistance eligibility.

However, I doubt about of the planners concerned have given any serious thought to the direct consequences of this arrangement.

The offer of cheaper flats to a sector of tenants to older estates is to intensify the social and economic segregation of a society. Therefore, the economically less fortunate group will be concentrated in a few older estates, while the comparatively better off group will be in a few new estates.

The revision of the present Public Assistance eligibility is necessary. However, I doubt if we should encourage poor tenants to apply for Public Assistance mainly for the rent allowance which has been raised to cope with the high rent charged in new estates. The number of people on Public Assistance annually is one of the indicators about the size of the problem of poverty. Of course, I believe that the economy of Hongkong will keep on growing in the next few years. As a citizen of Hongkong, I really feel shameful for the fact that many will be in the barely subsistence level and cannot like others, share in the growing prosperity of Hongkong.

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